

**‘TO HIM WE BELONG AND TO HIM WE RETURN’ – WHY DOES GOD TEST US?**

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**ABSTRACT:**

All the human beings face challenges, losses, trials, adversities, and hardships in one form or the other – sometimes through losses and sometimes through abundance. If we fail to realize the reasons and wisdom behind such tests, we can commit grave mistakes which not only lead us to a depressed and dejected life in this world but also take away our success in the hereafter. It is, accordingly, very important to firstly, understand the reasons and rationale behind the concept of tests and trials and, secondly, to respond to them in a befitting and appropriate manner. In order to explore these aspects, we have reviewed the concept of tests, trials, and adversities from theological as well psychological perspective. Anchored in verses 155-157 of Surah Al-Baqarah, the scope of this paper is spread over the reasons why we are subjected to tests and trials, the means and modes of such tests, and the response a believer should demonstrate when undergoing any trials and tribulations.

**Keywords:** Trials, Suffering, Attitude, Positive Mindset

**INTRODUCTION:**

The man has come to this world for a short duration. Even if someone lives for a hundred years, he will have to face death and return to his Lord. In contrast to this short worldly life, the life of the hereafter will never end. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning): “...Are you pleased with the life of this world (*Dunya*) rather than the hereafter (*Aakhira*)? But little is the enjoyment of the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter” (Quran, Surah Al-Tawbah: 38). It is also said (interpreted meaning): “And the life of this world is nothing but play and amusement. But far better is the house in the hereafter for those who are Al-Muttaqun (the pious). Will you not then understand?” (Quran, Surah Al-An’aam: 32). The same aspect has also been highlighted by our beloved messenger (PBUH) in a beautiful hadith:

“The life of this world compared to the hereafter is as if one of you were to put his finger in the ocean and take it out again then compare the water that remains on his finger to the water that remains in the ocean” (Saheeh Muslim, 2858).

It is unfortunate, though, that many of the human beings remain oblivious to this fact and live a life that is void of the remembrance of their creator. It is extremely pertinent to understand the real purpose of our lives and the reality of what we see around us. All that happens in the world happens for a reason (Beauchemin, 2015). If we want to live a meaningful life and acquire contentment, we need to understand those reasons and the rules with which Allah SWT govern this world (Maududi, 2002). That understanding would help us shape our responses in a manner that would be appropriate and praiseworthy.

One of the very powerful passages of the Quran that elaborate this aspect are verses 155-157 of Surah Al-Baqarah. The passage also contains the verse whose translation has been chosen as the title for this paper. In this paper, we will elaborate the topic under discussion in the light of these verses. These verses are as follows:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاطِ ۚ وَبَشِيرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient,

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَأَنَا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him, we will return."

أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

Those are the ones upon whom are the blessings of their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.

#### SCOPE OF THIS PAPER:

This paper explores the following three aspects in relations to tests and appropriate response from a believer to such tests (in the light of verses 155-157 of Surah Al-Baqarah):

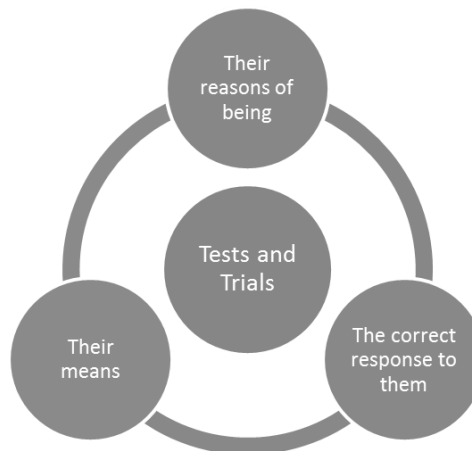


Figure 1: Scope of this paper

#### THE PURPOSE OF TESTS:

In verse 155, Allah SWT has told that tests in this world are inevitable. The letter ن (where it is used the second time) in the word لَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ is a sign of definitiveness (i.e. it acts as Nun Al-Tawkeed which when used in a verb is an indicator of emphasis of meaning) - this further emphasizes the definitiveness that was conveyed through the use of letter لَ; the tests will most definitely happen, large or small (Khan, 2014). Prophet PBUH clarified this for us by saying:

“The parable of the believer is like the plant; the wind does not stop causing it to sway, and the believer does not stop suffering trials” (Jami Tirmidhi, Book 44, Hadith 3105).

This does not distinguish between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the pious and the sinner – everyone will be tested and then rewarded based on the performance displayed in the test that was put forth.

Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning):

And fear the trial which affects not in particular (only) those of you who do wrong, (but it may afflict all the good and bad people). (Quran Surah Al-Anfaal: 25)

This concept nullifies the concept that if difficulty comes on us, it is always a punishment from God (though sometimes it is). Allah SWT is the All-Knower. He does not need to test us to find out how we behave in these tests. The tests and trial provide us numerous benefits, as explained in this section. They, accordingly, can be considered to be a sign of Allah’s blessings on us when they are not coming to us as a punishment. Prophet Muhammad PBUH said:

Narrated Abu Huraira R.A.: Allah's Messenger PBUH said, "If Allah wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials." (Saheeh al-Bukhari 5645)

That is why the messengers and prophets went through biggest of trials. Allah SWT mentions about the trials that the prophets and their companions went through and mention (interpreted meaning): “And how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious scholars. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast” (Quran Surah Aal Imran:146). Ibrahim A.S.’s own father disowned him and he was put in the fire. Musa A.S. had to face numerous persecutions at the hand of Pharaoh. Yusuf’s A.S. brother put him in the well and he was imprisoned. Ayub A.S. was tested with illness and disease. Yunus A.S. was eaten by fish and had to live in its belly for forty days. Isa A.S. was tortured and an attempt was made to crucify him. And the best of the mankind, Muhammad (PBUH) was tortured in his own homeland by his own people too. He had to face the boycott and live with his companions in the valley of Abu Talib with no resources and food supplies. This was also not the end to the atrocities he faced. He and his companions had to leave their beloved home, Makkah, too and settle in Madinah. This clearly explains that these tests were not a punishment from God.

What are these tests then? The tests happen because of many reasons. We have contemplated on this issue from theological as well as psychological point perspectives. The following passages summarize the finding in relation of these two paradigms of viewing the hardships, pain, and affliction.

#### **Theological viewpoint:**

A few of the important reasons are mentioned below in the light of three Abrahamic faiths<sup>1</sup>.

1. Tests are a means of strengthening us for bigger responsibilities in life (Yanklowitz, 2011). Consider the example of moth which struggles a lot to come out of the cocoon. This struggle happens for many days before the moth can finally come out. However, while going through this struggle over many days, the moth develops the strength that helps us live its life later on. If the cocoon is broken due to some reason and the moth is freed from it, it is never able to move from the location where it falls. Same is the case with human beings. When we go through the struggle and hardship, we get prepared to deal with bigger challenges in life and cope with any setbacks that we may need to face.

One of the examples from the Seerah that emphasize this point is the battle of Uhud. In that battle, when the companions failed to adhere to the commands of the Messenger of Allah PBUH in full, Allah SWT put them through trials in terms of injuries and losses of life. Allah SWT mentions (interpreted meaning): "So Allah repaid you with distress upon distress so you would not grieve for that which had escaped you [of victory] or [for] that which had befallen you [of injury and death]. And Allah is [fully] Acquainted with what you do. Then after distress, He sent down upon you security..." (Quran Surah Aal Imran:152-153). It was because of these trials and hardships that when Muslims came across other challenges in future, they became very easy for them. Allah SWT mentions (interpreted meaning): "Those to whom hypocrites said, 'Indeed, the people have gathered against you, so fear them.' But it [merely] increased them in faith, and they said, 'Sufficient for us is Allah, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs.'" (Quran Surah Aal Imran:183)

The same meaning is conveyed in a verse from New Testament: "For you, know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." (James 1:3 ESV). A similar connotation is held in the verse Deuteronomy 8:16 of Torah according to which God put the Israelites through the suffering in the desert for 40 years so that they could develop the necessary endurance to be successful in their future endeavors. This event and its relevant details were also confirmed in the Quran in Surah Al-Baqarah.

2. Tests segregate the pure from the impure (Hasan, 2013; Shirazi, Subhani, & Rizvi, 2014). Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning): "Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe,' without being put to the test?" (Quran Surah Ankaboot:2). He also says (interpreted meaning): "We have tested those before them, for God must distinguish those who are truthful, and He must expose the liars." (Quran Surah Ankaboot:3). This is

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<sup>1</sup> All the sacred scriptures were revealed by the same ONE God and they contained the same true message in their original form. With the passage of time, people added their opinions and recorded their ideas within the texts which modified their original form. God, however, preserved the Quran in its original form as it is to serve as the final guidance from Him for all the times to come. It is accordingly unchanged from the very first day.

Despite several human corruptions induced in the Jewish and Christian sacred texts, there are still some verses in them which convey the true message from God. Scholars of Islam allow the use of those verses from the previous scripture (called *Israeliyyat*) which are not in contradiction to the Quran and hadith. In the current section, we have quoted some of such verses from the old and new testament

a highly beneficial aspect for the Muslim community. In the battle of Uhud, 300 *munafiqoon* (hypocrites) left the Muslim army just before the battle to leave them alone to face the battle. That battle was a big test for Muslims and they suffered a loss by not fully adhering the command of the Muslims. This event highlighted the ones who were clearly the hypocrites and those who were more tilted towards kufr than the Imaan on the day. Allah SWT mentioned: "Allah will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He separates what is evil from what is good" (Quran Surah Aal-Imran:179). He SWT also says in the Quran: "...And these days [of varying conditions] We alternate among the people so that Allah may make evident those who believe and [may] take to Himself from among you martyrs - and Allah does not like the wrongdoers - And that Allah may purify the believers [through trials]..." (Quran Surah Aal Imran:140-141)

A verse in the New Testament conveys the same meaning. It is said: "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tests hearts" (Proverbs 17:3 ESV), i.e. to make it evident which ones are pure and which aren't). Torah also provides guidance on this matter through the verses such as Deuteronomy 8:2, "...to test you and make known what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

3. Tests and trials provide us an opportunity to come out of our routine cycles and engage in the remembrance of our creator (Yanklowitz, 2011). Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning): "He is the One who moves you across the land and sea. You get onto the ships, and they sail smoothly in a nice breeze. Then, while rejoicing therein, violent wind blows, and the waves surround them from every side. This is when they implore God, sincerely devoting their prayers to Him alone: "If You only save us this time, we will be eternally appreciative. But as soon as He saves them, they transgress on earth, and oppose the truth. O people, your transgression is only to the detriment of your own souls. You remain preoccupied with this worldly life, then to us is your ultimate return, then we inform you of everything you had done." (Quran Surah Yunus:22-23). This is not only true for individuals but also nations. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning): "Before you We sent (messengers) to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity, that they might learn humility. Why then, did they not supplicate in humility when a calamity from Us came upon them? Instead, their hearts were hardened and Satan adorned for them what they were doing. (Quran Surah An'am:42-43)
4. Tests help us increase our reward and get rid of our bad deeds i.e. Takfir al-Dhunub (Hasan, 2013). This can be understood from the hadith in which prophet Muhammad PBUH has said: "Trials will not cease afflicting the believing man and the believing woman in their self, children, and wealth until they meet Allah without having any sin" (Jami` at-Tirmidhi Book 34 Hadith 2399). In another narration, it is said: "No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that" (Saheeh al-Bukhari 5641, 5642). So as we go through the trials and adversities, Allah SWT erases our sins reducing the burden on us in the hereafter.

The New Testament has a verse which also conveys the similar meaning and explains that those who remain patient when afflicted, get the reward from their Lord. "Blessed is the

man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12 ESV)

5. Tests are a means of removing from us some bigger hardships. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning): “It may be that you dislike a thing and it is good for you and that you may like a thing and it is bad for you; Allah knows but you do not know” (Quran Surah Al-Baqarah:216). These hardships often act as a warning which can put us back on the straight path (Hasan, 2013).
6. Sometimes, we are not aware of our full true potential. We only happen to realize them when a difficulty comes our way and we are able to manage it well – sometimes in a manner that we had never thought-about (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2016; Shirazi et al., 2014). Allah SWT puts certain afflictions in our way so that we can realize our worth and abilities. Such abilities can then be deployed in numerous other situations. Allah SWT mentions (interpreted meaning): “Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear...” (Quran Surah Baqarah: 286). So, whatever comes our way, we are stronger than that. If we adopt such a mindset, we will be able to think of ways and methods to overcome the difficulties and hardships. Such a positive mindset is really the key. On contrary, if we think that the problems are too big for us to handle, we will get into a depression and this negative mindset will further add to our suffering.  
A verse in the New Testament conveys the similar meaning: “He [God] will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (Corinthians 10:13 ESV)
7. Because of tests, trials, and losses, we get to understand the real value of Allah’s blessings. The small things that we often do not notice and do not give attention too catch our eyes after the adversities and we begin to enjoy them (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2016). This is very important from the psychological point of view. If a person does not realize the value and blessings of what he or she has and keep on complaining about what he or she does not have, it is highly likely that such a person would develop depression and anxiety. On contrary, if that person is made to realize the true worth of what he or she already has, then the person would have an opportunity to be thankful to his Lord and enjoy the blessings that have been bestowed on him or her.
8. Hardships also happen as a result of our mistakes and misdoings. Allah SWT mentions in the Quran (interpreted meaning): “Why when a disaster struck you, although you had struck [your enemies] with one twice as great [a disaster], you said, ‘From where is this?’ Say, ‘It is from yourselves.’ Indeed, Allah is over all things competent. And what struck you on the day the two armies met was by permission of Allah that He might make evident the [true] believers. And that He might make evident those who are hypocrites...” (Quran Surah Aal Imran:165-167). This verse was regarding the battle of Uhud when the losses befell on Muslims because they failed to adhere the orders of the Prophet PBUH. In another verse, Allah SWT has mentioned (interpreted meaning): “And whatever of

misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned. And He pardons much" (Quran Surah Ash-Shoora:30).

All this shows that the tests are not bad in themselves. What is bad is if we do not pass those tests because of our lack of preparation or incorrect response to what we are tested with.

#### **Psychological Viewpoint:**

After this theological explanation, let us now look at from the psychological perspective. The limitation with psychology, like any other branch of science, is that it can only explain what is observable in this world. The spiritual aspects of humans and what is to come in the hereafter is beyond its domain. In terms of observable aspects in relation to pain and suffering, It is no surprise that the recent psychological studies fully confirm what we have explained above from the theological point of view. Following is an overview.

Dr. Steven Stosny, a distinguished psychologist who provides counseling services for a number of psychological issues and has written various books and articles on the topics of pain and suffering explains his experience as follows:

As a life-saving alarm system, pain keeps us focused on distress, for the purpose of relieving it. Pain motivates behavior that will help heal, repair, or improve. A pain in your foot, for example, will motivate you to take the rock off it, get more comfortable shoes, soak it in a tub of warm water, or visit a podiatrist. If we do not act on the motivation to heal-repair-improve (or fail in our attempts to do so), the alarm of pain intensifies and generalizes. The toothache becomes facial pain; the sore foot seems to throb along the whole side of the body. When pain intensifies and generalizes over time, it becomes suffering. Suffering is repeated failure to act successfully on the natural motivation of pain to do something that will heal, repair, or improve.(Stosny, 2011)

So it is clear that from the psychological perspective as well, pain and suffering are means which help us take initiative and take actions to improve our situation and also do such acts that are beneficial for the whole society.

It is also pointed out by psychologists that suffering gives us a greater appreciation of the moments of comfort. Klempner (2010) points out:

If life were comfortable 24/7, we wouldn't be able to appreciate the moments of comfort. There would be nothing to compare comfort to. This is analogous to a marathon runner. If there were no suffering in running a marathon there would be no comfort, and certainly no sense of accomplishment, in crossing the finish line. Mountain climbers voluntarily endure excruciating suffering, often for weeks on end, in their attempt to reach the summit. They risk their lives, endure high altitude sickness, bottomless crevasses and glaciers, mountain storms, snow blindness, and sudden storms all to experience the several moments of magnificent comfort and satisfaction the mountain summit has to offer.



He further points out that “suffering can include the most profound happiness within it”. To support this opinion he presents examples of great figures like Nelson Mandela who endured great pain for their causes, but all that pain was a source of happiness for them “knowing that they were achieving greatness and actualizing their potential (and the potential of their people) through the hardships they suffered”.

Beauchemin agrees with this and explains:

Inspiration is rooted in hardship, and from it flourishes happiness. Some of the most powerful influencers of good have gone through the roughest, lowest ordeals. Tales of overcoming adversity create powerful human networks. When we come to see one another for the amazing, resilient beings we are, we start to truly believe change is possible. Hardships are agonizing. But it's how we choose to deal with them that will transform our pain into growth. By recognizing the positive impacts of our struggles, we become stronger, more capable agents of change. We become the path towards better, leaving the bitter behind. (Beauchemin, 2015)

The other potential benefits that the pain and hardship foster for us, which are in complete alignment with what the theological viewpoint explains, are as follows:

In recent years, psychologists have become aware of phenomenon known as 'post-traumatic growth.' This term was originally coined by the psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, who interviewed many people who had suffered traumatic life-events such as bereavement, serious illness (such as cancer), housefires, combat and becoming refugees. They found that, for many of these people, dealing with this trauma was a powerful spur for personal development. It wasn't just a question of learning to cope with or adjust to negative situations; they actually gained some significant benefits from them. In Tedeschi and Calhoun's terms, they experienced 'positive life changes.' They gained a new inner strength, and discovered skills and abilities they never knew they possessed. They became more confident and appreciative of life, particularly of the 'small things' that they used to take for granted. They became more compassionate for the sufferings of others, and more comfortable with intimacy, so that they had deeper and more satisfying relationships. One of the most common changes was that they developed a more philosophical or spiritual attitude to life. In Tedeschi and Caohoun's words, their suffering led them to a 'deeper level of awareness.' (Taylor, 2011)

The inverted bell-curve of the post-traumatic growth is represented as follows:





**Figure 2:** Post-traumatic growth curve

As soon as the person suffers a sudden major loss, they are in a state of denial for a short time. It then turns into anger which gradually converts to depression and sadness. With the passage of time, the acceptance stage is reached. Though not everyone goes through all the stages, many people experience these four milestones on the inverted bell curve shown in figure 2. During this process, Allah SWT provides people with an opportunity when some brilliant idea comes to their mind. Those who benefit from this opportunity create wonders that the rest of the world admires and appreciates. The examples for this are countless. For instance, when Imran Khan, the famous ex-captain of Pakistan cricket team turned politician, helplessly saw his mother die from cancer. Allah gave him the idea at that moment that he should save others from suffering this fate and that's what he did. He made a really high-stand cancer hospital in Pakistan, first of its kind, which provides completely free medical treatment to the needy. Many more examples of this kind are spread all around us.

From above, it is very evident that hardships are not always a form of punishment, as believed by many. In fact, it is a means by which humans reap numerous benefits. This aspect was already pointed out to us by the best of the creations, Muhammad PBUH who said that: “: “Great reward comes with great trials. When Allah loves a people, He tests them” (Sunan Abu Dawood, 3090). These tests, as a result, purify the believers and prepare them to be stronger and successful for the future.

#### **THE MEANS OF TESTS:**

In the ayah 155, Allah SWT has mentioned that the tests can be anything from fear, hunger, and loss of wealth, life and crops. These all losses are tests through adversities.

So does this mean that the tests only through adversities? No, the tests can be in abundance too. Testing with blessings is considered a bigger test that they don't even realize they are in a test. Such tests are mentioned in Surah Az-Zumar. Allah SWT says:

If the human is touched by adversity, he implores us, but as soon as we bestow a blessing upon him, he says, “I attained this because of my cleverness!” Indeed, this is only a test, but most of them do not know. (Quran Surah Az-Zumar:49)

Then why in this verse has Allah only mentioned about the adversities? The context of this passage helps understand the answer to this question. In the proceeding verse, Allah SWT has mentioned about the loss of life in the way of Allah. Allah SWT commanded that those people should not be considered as dead. Rather they are alive, but we don't understand. In this

context, Allah SWT further explains in the ayahs under discussion that if such a thing befalls, it would not be considered a punishment from God. It would be a test. Those who have faith will be tested and the pure would be segregated from the impure.

#### **A BELIEVER'S RESPONSE TO TESTS AND TRIALS:**

One of the most important Islamic principles of dealing with tests is to have a positive mindset. We have to realize that after the difficulty, there is ease; sometimes we can see it and sometimes we can't. Sometimes, a hardship protects us from a bigger hardship and we do not even realize that. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning): "Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease." (Quran Surah Ash-Sharh: 6). We should have patience and should jump to undue conclusions. This is especially true in case we lose a loved one. The reward of being patient in that situation is nothing but Jannah. Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: Allah, the Exalted, says: 'I have no reward except Jannah for a believing slave of Mine who shows patience and anticipates My reward when I take away his favourite one from the inhabitants of the world.'  
(Riyad us Saliheen, Book 7, Hadith 923)

Second important thing to understand is that Allah SWT runs this universe with certain principles which cannot change except for the situations and cases which Allah knows. One of such aspects is death. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning):

Every human being is bound to taste death: but only on the Day of Resurrection will you be requited in full [for whatever you have done] - whereupon he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph: for the life of this world is nothing but an enjoyment of self-delusion. (Quran Surah Aal Imran: 185)

Thirdly, it should also be understood that though not all the trials are a punishment from God, some can be. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning):

And let those who oppose the Messenger's (Muhammad's) commandments beware lest some trials befall them or a painful torment be inflicted upon them. (Quran Surah An-Noor: 63).

He also says:

"...For their sins We destroyed them..." (Quran Surah An'am:6)

When facing any difficulties, we should repent of our bad deeds and turn to Allah in true repentance. This needs to be done at the individual as well as communal level. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad PBUH told us the reward of good deeds when going through tough times in a beautiful narration:

Ma'qil bin Yasar (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Messenger of Allah PBUH said, "The reward of worship performed at a time of trials is equal in reward to an emigration to me." (Riyad us Saliheen Book 12, Hadith 1366)

When undergoing trial, we should turn our hearts to the remembrance of Allah SWT. This approach will help avoid distress and depression. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning):

Then, whoever follows My Guidance shall neither go astray, nor fall into distress and misery. (Quran Surah Taa Haa: 123)

The above two points, being patient and being pious, in the times of trial have also been mentioned by Allah SWT in the following verse:

You shall certainly be tried and tested in your wealth and properties and in your own selves; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you from those who receive the Scripture before you (Jews and Christians) and from those who ascribe partners to Allah, but if you persevere patiently, and become pious, then verily, that will be a determining factor in all affairs and that is from the great matters. (Quran Surah Aal Imran: 186).

In Surah Aal Imran, Allah SWT has mentioned a beautiful dua of the true believers when they are afflicted with trials:

And how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious scholars. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast. And their words were not but that they said, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excess [committed] in our affairs and plant firmly our feet and give us victory over the disbelieving people." So Allah gave them the reward of this world and the good reward of the Hereafter. And Allah loves the doers of good (Quran Surah Aal Imran:146-148)

We should ensure that we don't despair for it is a sinful act in itself. Allah SWT says (interpreted meaning):

O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [in sin], do not despair of the mercy of Allah! Verily, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most-Merciful (Quran Surah Az-Zumar:53)

If we leave what we were entrusted with, i.e. the deen of Allah and excellence of character, we will get humiliated. But if we correct ourselves and fix our affairs in a correct manner, Allah SWT will put our respect in people's heart and make us successful in this world and the hereafter.

Allah SWT says:

Who is the One who rescues those who become desperate and call upon Him, relieves adversity, and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is it another god with God? Rarely do you take heed? (Quran Surah Naml:62)

Rasool Allah PBUH has summarized the attitude of a Muslim in the times of adversities in this beautiful narration:

"How wonderful is the case of a believer! There is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity attends him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him". (Riyad us Saliheen, Book 1, Hadith 27)

If we understand our own reality and the reality of this world, we will be much more mature and sound in our responses and reactions. The next section explains this concept in the light of verse 156 of Surah Al-Baqarah.

#### **‘To Him we belong and to Him we return’**

It is a common practice among the Muslims that when we hear about the loss of a loved one of someone, we ritually utter a statement *“Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilaihi Rajioon”*, often with little or no understanding of the gems that this beautiful statement entails in its meanings.

This verse explains the real meaning of what being a ‘Sabir’ means. Those who are truly patient understand that all of what they have and they themselves belong to Allah SWT. They are neither the owner of what they have nor their own selves. We are answerable to how we use our body. Allah has given us the eye; we have to answer how we used it. Allah has provided us with ears; we will be asked to explain what we chose to hear from them. Allah has given us hands and feet; we will be questioned about the way we use them and where we use them to walk towards. If these things were our own property, we would not have been answerable for their use. But the reality is that all of us and all of what we have belongs to Allah SWT.

Now consider the example of a person who has been entrusted with some money for a period of time. If that person starts to think that he is the owner of that money, he will definitely be at fault. Now, it would be even more inappropriate for that person to say that he has been wronged if the actual owner takes his thing back. It is understandable that the person can get sad when something that stayed with him for some time has gone. However, being angry about this, labeling the actual owner as unjust, or asking ‘why me?’ is grossly inappropriate. If we understand this reality, we can avoid depression and anxiety to a large extent. When we think that what is with us is actually not ours, we will not fall into extreme stress when it is lost.

At the same time, we should also be careful and mindful when what is entrusted to us is still with us. The One who has given us all the things and allowed us to use them for certain time has also given us certain rules and regulations within which we have to use these things. If we break our oath and commitment regarding how we will use His things, it is just for Giver to question us. If found guilty, the punishment would be completely justified. The Owner, however, can choose to forgive us if He wishes. What we need to do in this case is to first ensure that we make the right and correct use of the things that have been entrusted to us. In addition to this, we should bow our heads in thankfulness and seek forgiveness from our Lord, Who is most forgiving. If we remember Him, He remembers us.

#### **The reward of those who respond to the trials in the right manner:**

In verse 155, Allah SWT has mentioned *وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ* ('And give glad-tidings to the patient). The word '*Bash-shir*' is commonly translated as 'give glad-tidings', however, this does not convey the full meaning of this word. The word *basharah* means 'such a good news hearing which the happiness becomes very apparent on the face of the one who hears it'. In this manner, it can be understood that those who are being patient are given some really great news. They will reap the benefits of being steadfast and patient. In verse 157, Allah SWT announces further rewards for them. Those who understand that they themselves and what they have is not their own, rather it is from Allah SWT to whom it has to return, sooner or later, are told that they are the truly guided ones. Because of this, they will receive *rahmah* from their Lord.

Another beautiful grammatical device used in this ayah is the use of word *أُولَئِكَ* which refers to those people who are at some distance, in this case at a height in terms of their character and attributes. It is as if the readers have been told 'those people who are patient and respond to calamities in the manner they should be responded to, are up there and you have to make an effort if you wish to attain the same esteemed status'.

Another beautiful aspect associated with the use of the word *Rahmah* is that those people are apparently going through difficult times, but because of their approach towards calamities, Allah has blessed them with peace and blessing. They get the courage to face biggest calamities without breaking down. Even the biggest of trials do not move them and they remain steadfast. This indeed is a great blessing – a blessing that cannot be purchased with money. Their rewards for the *aakhirah* will further add to their blessings and they will be from those who will be considered successful on the final day.

#### **A believer's supplication if he faces a loss:**

Rasool Allah PBUH has taught us a beautiful dua that should be recited when any loss happens. This loss can be big or small. Umm Salamah, the wife of the Prophet (s.a.w), said: "I heard the Prophet (s.a.w) say: 'There is no person who is afflicted with a calamity and says:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ اللَّهُمَّ أَجْزِنِي فِي مُصِيبَتِي وَأَخْلِفْ لِي خَيْرًا مِنْهَا

"Verily to Allah we belong and unto Him is our return. O Allah, reward me for my affliction and compensate me with something better" - but Allah will reward him for his affliction and compensate him with something better." As believers, we should pray in this manner when we are afflicted with any hardship.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The paper has explained verses 155-157 of Surah Al-Baqarah in the light of a number of verses from Quran and prophetic traditions. A believer is expected to understand the reasons for the tests and trials which Allah SWT has already explained in the Quran very clearly. He SWT has also explained the attitude we have towards hardship and the response that the believers are expected to demonstrate. May Allah make us from those who adhere to His guidance and the guidance of our beloved Messenger Muhammad (PBUH).

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